UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.5/1997/5
16 January 1997

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
Thirty-fifth session
25 February-6 March 1997
Item 3 of the provisional agenda*

FOLLOW-UP TO THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Emerging issues, trends and new approaches, and programme activities of the Secretariat and the regional commissions relating to social development, including the situation of specific groups

Report of the Secretary-General

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* E/CN.5/1997/1.

97-01333 (E) 050297

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INTRODUCTION

1. In its resolution 1996/7, the Economic and Social Council requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Commission for Social Development under the substantive item "Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development", inter alia, a report on emerging issues and trends and new approaches to issues affecting social development, including the situation of specific groups. In the provisional agenda of the Commission for Social Development for its thirty-fifth session, as approved by the Council in its decision 1996/243, the Secretary-General is further mandated to report, in the context of the above-mentioned report, on related programme activities of the Secretariat and the regional commissions. The present report has been prepared in response to those mandates with respect to global issues and related programme activities. Regional issues and related United Nations activities are summarized in an addendum (E/CN.5/1997/5/Add.1).

I. SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

A. Major issues and recent developments

2. In the report on this subject prepared two years ago for the Commission for Social Development, it was emphasized that, in a period of rapid change, it was particularly difficult to identify significant trends and distinguish transient from lasting changes affecting society. If anything, the pace of change in many spheres of economy and society has accelerated since then, adding to the difficulties faced by Governments in identifying problems and responding with appropriate policy initiatives.

3. Against a background of the many real changes affecting the everyday life of citizens, changes in perception have also gathered pace in all regions of the world regarding the respective roles in policy of the different social partners and the various economic agents in promoting economic growth, prosperity and the well-being of communities.

4. In countries at different levels of development and in different regions, certain common concepts on how to manage the economy have nonetheless gained ground, with an emphasis on market approaches and privatization. In the realm of government, different forms of devolution, decentralization or people empowerment are being advocated and experimented with in many countries and sectors. No clear consensus has yet emerged about the efficacy, yet alone the social acceptance, of those new approaches, which seem to have been determined in large measure by subjective factors that can change rapidly. One important phenomenon that needs close attention is the impact of globalization - driven by the dominant political and commercial interests in a handful of major economies - on different societies and on various population groups.

5. Economic growth has been concentrated in countries and regions. Rapid growth in East and South-East Asia has diminished the incidence of poverty, supported in some notable cases by national policies to target significant groups living in poverty. The world's poor are increasingly concentrated in

sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and some regions of Latin America, where growth rates are lower and distribution patterns more skewed.

B. Programme activities

6. The World Summit for Social Development, at the level of heads of State or Government, was the first gathering of Governments to recognize the significance of social development and human well-being for all and to accord the highest priority to those goals. The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action reflect a comprehensive perception of social development and mark the emergence of a collective determination to treat social development as the highest priority of national and international policies.

7. The secretariat of the Summit, assisted by the Division for Social Policy and Development, Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development of the United Nations Secretariat, provided substantive servicing to the third session of the Preparatory Committee for the Summit, which was held in New York from 16 to 27 January 1995. The Summit secretariat assisted in the preparation of the draft declaration and programme of action, which were transmitted for further consideration and adoption by the Summit, as well as in the final preparations for the Summit, including the accreditation of non-governmental organizations and the adoption of the provisional agenda and organization of work.

8. Throughout the preparatory process and during the Summit, the Summit secretariat worked closely with the host Government to ensure that facilities and organization at the site met the requirements for a United Nations conference. It organized special events, including meetings, symposia, round tables, workshops and panel discussions. Arrangements were made for the large number of non-governmental organizations in attendance (more than 800 organizations, with more than 2,000 representatives).

9. The Summit was attended by 186 States; 117 were represented at the level of head of State or Government. The secretariat provided substantive servicing to the Main Committee to finalize the draft declaration and programme of action for approval by the Summit. The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action were adopted by the Summit on 12 March 1995.

10. Since the Summit, the Division for Social Policy and Development has continued to provide substantive services to the intergovernmental bodies that review and appraise the implementation of the outcome of the Summit, in particular the Commission for Social Development, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. The Division has prepared documentation and policy recommendations on social development issues for consideration by those bodies; kept abreast of activities and actions taken by national Governments, the programmes and agencies of the United Nations system, and actors of civil society; and served as a link with non-governmental organizations for the monitoring and implementation of the objectives of the Summit.

11. At the thirty-fourth session of the Commission for Social Development, discussion focused on the arrangements for the implementation and follow-up of

the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action; a note on that subject was prepared by the Summit secretariat (E/CN.5/1995/8). In its resolution 34/4, the Commission transmitted its views to the Economic and Social Council on follow-up to the Summit, including recognition that the Commission should have a central role, and called for review by the Council of the mandate, agenda and composition of the Commission, including an expansion of its membership and annualization of its meetings. It also recommended opening its debates to experts and the main actors of civil society in the field of social development.

12. The Summit secretariat organized a seminar on the involvement of civil society in the follow-up to the Summit in 1995. The seminar brought together representatives of Governments, the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations to develop ideas for the implementation of the objectives, commitments and policy recommendations adopted by the Summit.

13. The Economic and Social Council, at its substantive session of 1995, had before it a note prepared by the Summit secretariat on the implementation and follow-up to the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development (E/1995/102). The Council subsequently adopted resolution 1995/60 on social development, in which it reaffirmed the recommendation contained in the Programme of Action that the Council should oversee system-wide coordination of the implementation of the outcome of the Summit.

14. At its fiftieth session, the General Assembly considered the item "Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development". It had before it the report of the Secretary-General (A/50/670), which focused on the supportive role of the intergovernmental bodies and the organizations of the United Nations system in the implementation of the Declaration and the Programme of Action adopted at Copenhagen. In its resolution 50/161 of 22 December 1995, the Assembly endorsed the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action.

15. In 1996, the Division for Social Policy and Development published a newsletter entitled Summit Plus One (three issues in 1996); the Bulletin on the Eradication of Poverty (two issues); and a special issue of the review Social Policy and Social Progress devoted to the Social Summit.

16. The Administrative Committee on Coordination, at its second regular session of 1995, established inter-agency task forces to ensure that the United Nations system effectively provides support for the integrated implementation at the country level of the action programmes that emerged from the World Summit for Social Development and other recent United Nations conferences. The Division represented the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development in the Task Force on Employment and Sustainable Livelihoods and the Task Force on Basic Social Services for All.

17. The Division prepared two reports of the Secretary-General for the special session of the Commission for Social Development held in May 1996 on the future role of the Commission for Social Development (E/CN.5/1996/2) and policy and programme considerations in the formulation of integrated strategies for poverty eradication, meeting the basic human needs of all and promotion of self-reliance and community-based initiatives (E/CN.5/1996/3).

18. During the special session, the Division organized three panel discussions, with invited experts on strategies and actions for the eradication of poverty, as well as a dialogue with the chairpersons of the inter-agency task forces on follow-up to recent major international conferences.

19. The Economic and Social Council, in its decision 1996/208, decided to invite, on an exceptional basis, all non-governmental organizations accredited to the Summit to participate at the special session of the Commission. Some 100 individuals from 50 non-governmental organizations attended the special session, representing the fullest non-governmental participation in the history of the Commission. Throughout the session, the Division facilitated their active participation in the work of the Commission.

20. At its fifty-first session, the General Assembly considered the item "Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development", on the basis of the report of the Secretary-General (A/51/348). General debate on the item was held in the plenary and a resolution was adopted at the end of the session.

21. In response to General Assembly resolution 49/110 and to facilitate an exchange of views in the Economic and Social Council on a possible programme to observe the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty (1996), the Division prepared a note for the Council at its substantive session of 1995 (E/1995/92) containing elements of a draft programme for the Year.

22. A report of the Secretary-General on the draft programme for the observance of the Year (A/50/551) was subsequently submitted to the General Assembly, closely based on the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action. It also reflected the resolutions and decisions adopted at the thirty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, the thirty-fourth session of the Commission for Social Development, and the third session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, as well as the results of consultations with the United Nations system and concerned non-governmental organizations.

23. The report elaborated the proposals contained in the above-mentioned note (E/1995/92), taking into account the observations and suggestions made in response to a note verbale sent to United Nations Member States by the Secretary-General in June 1995, as well as additional information provided by entities of the United Nations system, other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. The report identified the objectives, principles and theme of the Year, and described major activities that might be undertaken in observance of the Year. A logo for the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty was also created.

24. A number of events were organized to publicize the Year. On 18 December 1995, a special ceremony at United Nations Headquarters officially launched the Year, in conjunction with a celebration of the United Nations fiftieth anniversary. In June 1996, the Secretary-General met at Geneva with a delegation of people living in extreme poverty from 20 countries to discuss the concerns of the poor. On 17 October 1996, a special ceremony highlighting the Year and the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty was held at United

Nations Headquarters. The ceremony featured the dedication of a commemorative stone on the grounds of United Nations Headquarters.

25. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 50/107, a report of the Secretary-General provided the Assembly with a summary of action taken by the United Nations system in observance of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty (A/51/443). The report also provided a description of initiatives taken within and by the United Nations system to lay down the foundation of a long-term programme of support for the goals and objectives of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006). It also contained suggestions and recommendations for specific activities for each year of the Decade.

26. There is growing recognition that development policy should address not only conditions for efficient and sustained growth but livelihood and well-being as well. Economic and social issues are increasingly being seen less as discrete dimensions and more as particular perspectives on development. From the social perspective, development policies should address both social and economic variables, as well as the implications of planned objectives and instruments for levels of living, empowerment and social solidarity.

27. In the light of the observed shifts in development philosophy and approaches, the Division for Social Policy and Development, in cooperation with the Staff Development Service of the United Nations, organized workshops on the social perspective on development during 1995 and 1996, involving staff at United Nations Headquarters and, by correspondence, staff away from Headquarters and a select group of academics, policy analysts and governmental officials. The 1995 seminar considered approaches to policy formulation and evaluation from the social perspective, and the 1996 workshop, in the light of the observation of the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty, examined socially sensitive and gender-responsive approaches to policy design and evaluation to poverty eradication.

28. The workshops draw upon joint work between the Division for Social Policy and Development and the Development Planning Unit of University College, London, on strengthening national capacities for policy design and evaluation from the social perspective. As described in the monograph Socially Sensitive Policies in the Context of Structural Adjustment: A Training Manual,[1] the work was initially concerned with the social dimension of structural adjustment, and has since being applied to a wider range of priority clusters.

29. The Division has published a technical document entitled "Prevention of suicide: guidelines for the formulation and implementation of national strategies". The document resulted from collaboration among the Division, the Division of Mental Health of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Calgary WHO Collaborating Centre for Research and Training in Mental Health in the holding of an international expert meeting on guidelines for the formulation and implementation of comprehensive national strategies for the prevention of suicidal behaviour and the provision of supportive and rehabilitative services to persons at risk and to other affected persons, in May 1993. The above-mentioned technical document includes the report of the meeting, a comprehensive set of guidelines and a case study of a national strategy to prevent suicide.

The case study is the only known example of a national strategy that attempts, within an integrated approach, to identify the functions of all relevant institutions, public and private.

30. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 47/90, the Division has continued to act as focal point and catalyst for United Nations activities related to the promotion and support of the international cooperative movement. The Division has assisted the secretariats of the World Summit for Social Development, the Fourth World Conference on Women and the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in giving due consideration to the role of cooperatives. The conferences acknowledged the importance of the cooperative sector, and made reference to the cooperative movement in the commitments and strategies adopted. In cooperation with other members of the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives (COPAC), the Division prepared the report of the Secretary-General (A/51/267) on the status and role of cooperatives in the light of new economic and social trends.

31. The Division represented the United Nations in COPAC and supported the Committee's various activities. It co-organized, with the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), a panel discussion on the theme "Partnership between the United Nations and the international cooperative movement in the follow-up to Copenhagen, Beijing and Istanbul", held in New York on 1 July 1996.

32. In 1995, on the first Saturday in July, the first United Nations International Day of Cooperatives was observed in accordance with General Assembly resolution 47/90. "Cooperative enterprise: empowerment for people-centred sustainable development" was the theme chosen by the Division and ICA for joint observance of the Day in 1996.

33. The Division has prepared the major publication entitled Cooperative Enterprise in the Health and Social Care Sectors: A Global Survey. The Survey provides information on how needs for health care and social services are being met effectively and affordably through a variety of cooperative arrangements.

II. YOUTH

A. Major issues and recent developments

34. There has been some improvement in the situation of youth since the observance of International Youth Year (1985), such as increased attendance by young women in tertiary level education, increased health services for youth, and increased opportunities for youth to vote and participate in the political processes of many countries. At the same time, however, young people continue to encounter difficulties to find and enter productive employment; youth unemployment remains a chronic problem in many countries, and unemployment rates among youth are much higher than rates for adults throughout the world. In industrialized countries, the unemployment rate of the 15-24 age group in 1993 was estimated by the International Labour Organization (ILO) to be 17 per cent for young women and 16 per cent for young men, compared with figures of 8.2 per cent and 7 per cent for all women and men, respectively. In developing countries, ILO has indicated that available data suggests a similar pattern.

The countries with economies in transition are experiencing similar problems. Consequently, the world has witnessed the emergence of sizeable groups of young persons detached from the economic mainstream and caught in the webs of poverty.

35. Young people in some parts of the world continue to suffer from poor health as a result of societal conditions, including such factors as customary attitudes and harmful traditional practices, and in some cases as a result of their own actions. A number of Governments have taken action to provide basic health services for youth; promote good sanitation and hygiene practices among youth; develop health education and accessible, available and affordable primary health care services (including services related to sexual and reproductive health and relevant education in those fields, such as information about sexually transmitted diseases, such as human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS)); eliminate sexual abuse of young people; and combat malnutrition among young people.

36. According to WHO the worldwide daily rate of new infections with HIV is over 6,000 people. In many countries, 60 per cent of new infections are found among young people. Young women are twice as likely to be infected as young men. The group most vulnerable in terms of absolute numbers is single-partner married women, who are exposed to infection by sexually promiscuous husbands.

37. In addition, the incidence of unwanted pregnancies, especially teenage pregnancies, is high throughout the world. It was recently estimated that teen pregnancy rates in the United States of America amount to almost one million each year. In many developing countries, the problem is increasing because of inadequate access for young women to education about reproductive choices and family-planning services, and young women's lack of control over their reproductive decisions in unequal sexual partnerships.

38. The provision of sufficient and relevant educational opportunities for young people still remains a serious problem. Because of its high cost, education remains out of reach for many young people. Many educational systems have not responded adequately to the needs of youth or the general population. Many young people remain unprepared to enter the labour market as competent and qualified workers. Illiteracy among youth remains a pervasive problem in many countries, and is a major issue facing development planners. But in spite of the obstacles, young people are eager to gain access to educational resources and to use those resources to develop their lives, their communities and their countries.

B. Programme activities

39. The Youth Unit of the Division for Social Policy and Development undertook five types of activities during the period in question to observe the tenth anniversary of the United Nations International Youth Year (1985-1995) and to prepare for the implementation of the United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond.

40. In the field of international cooperation, consultations were held with representatives of a large number of non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations concerned with youth policies and programmes.

41. The Division organized the second World Youth Forum of the United Nations System (Vienna, 25-29 November 1996) bringing together approximately 500 representatives of both non-governmental youth organizations and intergovernmental youth-related organizations, pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 44/59 and 50/81. Among the non-governmental organizations were both those with formal affiliation or consultative status with the United Nations system and those that were meeting for the first time under the aegis of the United Nations.

42. Six meetings of an International Planning Committee were held to prepare for the Youth Forum. The following youth-related intergovernmental organizations were represented: Association of South-East Asian Nations Subcommittee on Youth, Commonwealth Youth Programme, Council of Europe's European Youth Centre and North-South Centre, Ibero-American Youth Organization, Inter-American Development Bank Youth Forum, League of Arab States Division of Youth and Sports, Organization of African Unity Division of Children and Youth, and the South Pacific Commission's Division of Youth.

43. Based on replies received from United Nations Member States, programmes and agencies of the United Nations system, other intergovernmental organizations, as well as non-governmental organizations, the Division submitted a draft world programme of action for youth to the year 2000 and beyond (A/49/434) to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session and to the Commission for Social Development at its thirty-fourth session (E/CN.5/1995/3). The Division provided substantive services to the detailed negotiations of the Commission, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly.

44. The Division also provided substantive services to the plenary meetings of the General Assembly, at its fiftieth session, held on the tenth anniversary of the International Youth Year, to consider the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. The special plenary meetings consisted of statements by representatives of 51 Member States, including ministers responsible for youth questions and directors of departments and commissions on youth. Representatives of eight international youth non-governmental organizations spoke in a special segment on 26 and 27 October 1995.

45. The Division continued to publish the United Nations Youth Information Bulletin in English, French and Spanish, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 32/135 on channels of communication with youth and youth organizations, which contains guidelines for the improvement of the channels of communication between the United Nations and youth and youth organizations (see, in particular, sect. C, "International"). In July 1996, the Division began the process of disseminating the Bulletin on-line as part of a new electronic network on the Internet, the United Nations Youth Information Network (UNYIN). UNYIN consists

of two parts: a directory of world youth resources and the interactive World Youth Forum. Information can be obtained at the following World Wide Web address:

http://www.un.org/dpcsd/dspd/unyin.html.

46. The World Youth Forum on the World Wide Web will reflect the 12 basic working groups of the World Youth Forum in which young people can share their ideas about the youth-related issues discussed: the working groups on education and leisure; employment; health and population; hunger and poverty; environment and sustainable development; human settlements; drug abuse; crime and juvenile delinquency; tolerance, racism and xenophobia; girls and young women; youth participation and youth rights; and youth and communications. The Web site introduces the objectives, work programme and participants of the World Youth Forum, and calls for messages to be sent by young people throughout the world.

47. Youth volunteers, interns and experts have begun to work in the United Nations Youth Unit to service this project. The ideas presented by young people have been summarized and presented to the relevant working groups at the World Youth Forum. One Web site has been set up by the Austrian Federal Youth Council at:

http://www.blackbox.at/wyf.

This project was also undertaken by the United Nations Youth Unit's UNYIN and the United Nations Children's Fund "Voices of youth" project at:

http://www.unicef.org

48. The United Nations Youth Fund has continued to provide seed-money grants in support of catalytic and innovative action in the field of youth by Governments and non-governmental youth organizations. A new emphasis, based on the mandate of the Programme of Action, is for pilot action, studies and technical exchanges on issues concerning youth that encourage the participation of youth in devising and carrying out projects whose short time-frames often make it difficult to obtain needed support from conventional budgeting processes. During 1995 and 1996, 14 projects were funded by the United Nations Youth Fund. In addition, the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development has allocated funds to assist the travel and subsistence of youth leaders of regional youth non-governmental organizations from Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Western Asia to attend the World Youth Forum of the United Nations system in Vienna.

49. The Governments of Austria, Denmark and Norway have made financial grants to assist the travel and subsistence of youth leaders of non-governmental youth organizations from the least developed countries to participate in the World Youth Forum. The Government of Sweden has financed the services of an associate expert on youth to help the Youth Unit prepare for, service and follow up the World Youth Forum in 1996, with operational projects undertaken on a joint basis between non-governmental youth organizations and youth-related organizations and agencies of the United Nations system. The Government of the Netherlands has

contributed to follow-up projects of an operational nature, especially to implement the United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth.

50. Pursuant to the Programme of Action, the existing ad hoc inter-agency working group on youth was convened three times in 1996 in connection with the World Youth Forum of the United Nations system. Those meetings brought together youth-related organizations and agencies of the United Nations system and other intergovernmental organizations; their primary purpose was to discuss ways and means of promoting the implementation of the Programme of Action on a coordinated basis.

51. The purposes of the annual inter-agency meeting on youth convened by this group were to review the progress achieved and obstacles encountered in the implementation of the Programme of Action; assist inter-agency preparation for the Forum; and strengthen inter-agency cooperation on youth at the national, regional and global levels. The first item consisted of a review of the status of the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond; the report of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Children and Youth in Especially Difficult Circumstances; the report of the Inter-Agency Steering Committee on Youth and Sustainable Development; the report of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Youth and Development; and reports on inter-agency follow-up on youth issues pertaining to recent United Nations world conferences concerned with human settlements, women, crime prevention and treatment of offenders, social development, population and development, human rights, and environment and sustainable development (1992-1996).

III. AGEING

A. Major issues and recent developments

52. Recent thinking on the question of ageing has focused on the participation and integration of older persons in society.

53. The World Summit for Social Development promoted the concept of a society for all. In that context, "Towards a society for all ages" was established as the overall theme for the International Year of Older Persons, 1999 (as set out in the conceptual framework of a programme for the preparation and observance of the International Year of Older Persons in 1999 (A/50/114)).

54. The purpose of adopting that theme was to draw attention to integrating older persons and developing their potential to benefit society, while also ensuring that care is available for frail older persons. It therefore promotes an approach that will utilize the skills and ability of older persons to improve both their own financial and social positions, and their ability to contribute to society.

55. The theme "Towards a society for all ages" has stimulated widespread interest, and is being taken up in studies, conferences, and practical initiatives in observance of the Year. The end result should be an age-integrated society, in which ageing issues are mainstreamed into development

planning, the early stages of life are adjusted for longevity, intergenerational arrangements are adjusted for population ageing, and the needs of the old and frail are fully met.

56. While debate is under way on exactly what constitutes a society for all ages, work continues on the situation of older persons, guided by the two principal texts of the United Nations programme on ageing: the International Plan of Action on Ageing and the United Nations Principles for Older Persons. Promotion of the Principles for Older Persons into policy, programmes and actions has been designated the overall objective of the Year of Older Persons.

57. A convergence of approaches to ageing is emerging among developed and developing countries, prompted in part by the weakening of traditional support systems - welfare in the case of developed economies, and family and community in the case of developing economies. To diminish welfare costs, developed country Governments are beginning to extend the retirement age, facilitate part-time employment in old age, introduce long-term care insurance, and in general rely on family and community to play a more active role in care-giving. Developing country Governments, in contrast, are introducing some welfare measures to complement the security formerly provided by family and community members as traditional support networks weaken in the wake of industrialization, urbanization and modernization. Just the same, the surest policy measures for older persons in developing countries remains what it has always been: support for family and community, which, in turn, is supported by rural development in particular.

58. Given the extended lifespan and the economic realities of the growing dependency ratios in today's societies, public policies should be explored to promote continued employment and retraining for those who still want to work. In addition, developing countries in the early stages of designing social policies for their rapidly ageing population also need to support community enterprises and their caretaking capacity.

59. In summary, the approach to ageing is evolving conceptually in the context of preparations for the Year, encompassing sectoral adjustments for lifelong self-reliance, family and community solidarity, and new social welfare and security arrangements. Efforts are now being made to match the conceptual evolution with a comparable operational expansion by involving - in addition to the traditional actors of government, non-governmental organizations and the United Nations system - new actors, such as the private sector, academia and the development community. The development community, in particular, has yet to demonstrate an active interest in the question of ageing and the situation of older persons.

B. Programme activities

60. During the period under review, a report of the Secretary-General, containing a conceptual framework of a programme for the preparation and observance of the International Year of Older Persons in 1999 was prepared for the General Assembly (A/50/114). In its resolution 50/141 of 30 January 1996, the General Assembly took note of the report and requested Member States, United

Nations organizations and bodies, as well as non-governmental organizations, to undertake concrete measures for the preparation for the Year. The report established the theme for the Year, "Towards a society for all ages", and the objective to promote the United Nations Principles for Older Persons (see Assembly resolution 46/91). The report also outlined a framework to lead international debate surrounding the Year consisting of four dimensions: the situation of older persons; lifelong individual development; multigenerational relationships; and development and the ageing of populations.

61. The Division is currently preparing its next report to the General Assembly, for submission at its fifty-second session. That report will establish the operational framework for the implementation of activities for the Year at the national, regional and international levels.

62. United Nations Member States, the programmes and agencies of the United Nations system, and non-governmental organizations are involved in the preparations for the Year.

Member States

63. During the special session of the Commission for Social Development (21-31 May 1996), a decision was recommended and later approved by the Economic and Social Council to establish an informal open-ended support group to assist the Commission in the preparations for the observance of the Year. The first organizational meeting was held in October and a substantive meeting was held in December 1996. Currently, 16 countries have named a focal point for the Year.

United Nations system

64. Financial constraints have prevented the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development from organizing and attending a seventh inter-agency meeting, planned for November 1995 in Geneva. Consequently, the Department has initiated plans for holding further inter-agency meetings in conjunction with major events in cases where outside sponsorship for the attendance of United Nations bodies can be found. The first such meeting will be at the International Association of Gerontology Congress at Adelaide, Australia, in August 1997. Twelve United Nations entities have named a focal point to date.

Non-governmental organizations

65. On 17 September 1995 at Jerusalem, an informal consultation of non-governmental organizations on preparations for the Year was organized by the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development on the occasion of the Second Global Conference of the International Federation on Ageing. Participants agreed to establish a collaborative international network of non-governmental organizations to facilitate preparations for the Year. The network will undertake international projects and disseminate information to various constituencies. It will also attempt to reach out beyond traditional constituencies, particularly to the media, the development community and the private sector.

66. A number of other networks of non-governmental organizations have been established: Coalition 99, established by the American Association of Retired Persons; a network of national affiliates of the Fédération internationale des associations de personnes agées; Creative Connections, established by the Non-Governmental Organizations Committee on Ageing, New York; and Twinage, established by the International Institute on Ageing, Malta.

67. Sixteen non-governmental organizations have named focal points for the Year.

Private sector

68. As part of a new initiative and in conjunction with the World Health Organization, the Department organized the First Joint Conference on Healthy Ageing in New York on 29 April 1996. The focus of the Conference was the nutritional and biomedical aspects of ageing. It was sponsored by two pharmaceutical companies: ASTA Medica Inc. and Henkel Corporation. The Conference received wide coverage in the media, in particular an extended feature on CNN International.

United Nations Secretariat

69. In mid-1995, the Division for Social Policy and Development started a newsletter entitled Countdown to 1999, which will be issued several times per year and distributed primarily to the non-governmental sector for their constituents.

70. During the reporting period, the Department allocated space for the programme on ageing on its Internet home page. Documents now available are the Countdown to 1999 series, the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, General Assembly resolution 47/5 establishing the Year, and the report of the Secretary-General on the conceptual framework for the Year (A/50/114).

71. The format of the Bulletin on Ageing was changed at the end of 1994 so that issues 2 and 3 in each year could be combined to contain articles on specific thematic issues. Issue 2/3 of 1995 was devoted to older women, issue 2/3 of 1996 to older persons and poverty. Issue 1 of each year will retain the original content and format: reporting on major developments in the area of ageing in the United Nations, Member States and non-governmental organizations.

72. The programme on ageing substantively participated in or co-sponsored the following events during the reporting period: a workshop on population ageing in Europe and North America, held at Geneva; the Whitehouse Conference on Ageing, held at Washington, D.C.; the Fourth International Congress of the European Association for Directors of Residential Care Homes for the Elderly, held in London; the International Federation on Ageing Global Conference on Ageing, held at Jerusalem; the Trans-Americas Congress on the theme "Better living: adding life to years", held at Santiago; the Fifth and Sixth Design Competition for the Elderly, held in Tokyo; an expert group meeting on the theme "Meeting the challenges of ageing populations in the developing world", held in Malta; the International Summit on Service to the Citizen, held at Denver; an international expert group meeting on political participation of older people in

Europe, held at Bonn; an international symposium on human settlements, held at San Diego; the Encuentro Iberoamericano de Asociaciones de Adultos Mayores, held at Havana; and the 1996 West Virginia Conference on Ageing.

73. As a follow-up to its expert group meeting on the role of governmental and non-governmental sectors in developing and implementing practical strategies on ageing in countries in change and transition, the United Nations programme on ageing prepared a technical publication entitled "Older persons in European countries in transition from the centrally planned economies: designing a policy response".

74. Because of dwindling contributions to the Trust Fund for Ageing, only two projects could be considered for support during the reporting period, funded from earmarked contributions from the Government of Germany: the literacy and income-generation training component of a project in the United Republic of Tanzania under the auspices of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to assist older Rwandan refugees living in camps in order to retrain and assist them to become self-sufficient upon their return to Rwanda; and the maintenance and development of a home visiting programme for vulnerable older people in Croatia.

IV. DISABLED PERSONS

A. Major issues and recent developments

75. In recent years, major advances have been made in the manner in which disability issues are viewed by societies and Governments, and in the elaboration of policies to address the needs and rights of persons with disabilities. The adoption by the United Nations of the Standard Rules for the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities was an important symbolic event highlighting on a global scale the cause of disabled persons. It was also a spur for practical action, which was given additional impetus by the global support given to the notion "society for all", coined at the World Summit for Social Development, a notion that had been conceived by the community of persons with disabilities and was later extended to all segments of society with special needs or handicaps. At the same time, the situation of the majority of persons with disabilities shows little concrete progress. They still face barriers to full participation, and in most developing countries lack even rudimentary technical aids and access to rehabilitation services.

B. Programme activities

76. During the period in question, a major project was completed with the publication for the United Nations by the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health in Finland of a manual entitled "The disability dimension in development action". The manual presents procedural guidance on how to design an inclusive policy framework in which people with disabilities can exercise their human rights and have equal opportunities to achieve well-being as full citizens. The manual also presents step-by-step advice and examples on how sensitivity to the disability dimension can be incorporated into

development programmes and projects. The manual was prepared with the full participation of persons with disabilities, as well as social workers, experts and planners at different levels of government in all regions of the world. An abridged version for field level use is nearing completion.

77. A report of the Secretary-General was prepared on the implementation of the World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons (A/50/473).

78. Three issues of the Disabled Persons Bulletin have been published. Guidelines have been prepared for observing the International Day of Disabled Persons (3 December). The Division helped to organize events to observe the Day at United Nations Headquarters in 1995 and 1996.

79. Conferences and workshops on disability legislation and policy were organized in New York and at Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, Accra, Ghana, Conakry, Guinea, and Vienna, and an information service was organized at the Third Paralympic Congress in Atlanta.

80. The United Nations Voluntary Fund on Disability supported 17 projects in the amount of US$ 360,000.

81. The Special Rapporteur on Disability of the Commission for Social Development, Mr. Bengt Lindqvist, carried out a full schedule of activities. He prepared a report for the consideration of the Commission for Social Development of its thirty-fourth session. On the basis of this report, and the findings of the Commission's working group, the Commission adopted resolution 34/2, entitled "Monitoring the implementation of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities". In that resolution, the Commission took note with appreciation of the report of the Special Rapporteur and of his recommendations, and welcomed his general approach to monitoring, including the emphasis to be placed on advice and support to States in the implementation of the Rules.

82. The Special Rapporteur organized and carried out a global survey related to the monitoring of the implementation of the Standard Rules. A total of 84 Governments and 163 non-governmental organizations from 96 countries responded to the questionnaire of the Special Rapporteur. The findings will be summarized in the final report on the three year mission 1994-1997 (A/52/56).

83. The Special Rapporteur convened two meetings of his expert panel of representatives of organizations of disabled persons. He travelled extensively to raise awareness of the Standard Rules, organize workshops and consult Governments, international organizations and national non-governmental organizations on matters relating to the Standard Rules. He also participated in 35 international conferences.

V. FAMILIES IN DEVELOPMENT

A. Major issues and recent developments

84. Families represent the basic unit of society, and as such play a central role in all spheres of life. Families are the first and most immediate medium of socialization, and under certain circumstances, provide security as well as emotional and social support to their members.

85. New sets of demands on families and new issues for Governments to address are being created by rapid but uneven changes in economic and demographic trends, such as an increasing number of single-parent households (largely headed by women); increasing incidence of first marriages at a later age but also a surge in teenage pregnancy; a decreasing number of children in families; longer life expectancy and increasing population of elderly family members; a predominantly young population in developing countries; and growing participation of women in the labour market. Such tendencies have caused changes in the structure, composition, forms and functions of families, resulting in varying perceptions of the roles and rights of their individual members.

86. The large number of employed women, the emerging new roles of men, and the need to balance work and family responsibilities are all challenges that place additional burdens on female members of households, while requiring changes in the role and contributions of fathers and husbands, especially with regard to homemaking, child care and family planning.

87. To tackle the diverse intersectoral concerns confronting families worldwide and provide the necessary support and protection to families, family-sensitive policies have been initiated in many countries in the areas of health, education, employment, housing and social security, participation, legislation and human rights. Adequate family support systems to facilitate balance between the diverse roles of family members - production, care and nurturing, and socialization - have become imperative. Empowerment and equal participation of families and of their individual members are essential to strengthen both families and the societies in which they live.

B. Programme activities

88. Activities relating to the follow-up to the International Year of the Family (IYF) have been integrated into the work programme of the Division for Social Policy and Development. The overall objective of the subprogramme is to achieve long-term development objectives regarding families in the context of the follow-up to the Year, within the framework of the implementation of family-related provisions of the global conferences of the 1990s.

89. Current work is guided both by the global conferences of the 1990s and the specific family-related mandates provided by intergovernmental bodies. The significance for families of the outcomes of the global conferences lies in their affirmation of the objectives of the International Year of the Family and their ability to create greater awareness of the value of a family-sensitive perspective in policy development.

90. During 1995-1996, the Division, as the focal point within the United Nations system in matters relating to families, continued its efforts to consult

and cooperate with Governments, non-governmental organizations and other IYF partners on an effective follow up.

91. The operation of the United Nations Trust Fund on Family Activities has provided financial assistance to projects of direct benefit to families, particularly in developing countries and the least developed countries. The Division has reviewed requests from Governments and non-governmental organizations for funding. Positive responses and requests for assistance have come from various governmental and non-governmental partners.

92. The Division initiated actions for the worldwide observance of the International Day of Families (celebrated each year on 15 May) by preparing background materials and information notes on the family and the international theme. Messages of the Secretary-General have been widely distributed during 1995 and 1996.

93. In its efforts to promote international cooperation on family issues, the United Nations has signed a memorandum of agreement with the Bratislava International Centre for Family Studies in the Slovak Republic, and has substantively assisted the Federal Ministry of Environment, Youth and Family Affairs of the Government of Austria in selecting candidates for the Visitor's Programme for Studying Exemplary Family Benefits and Family Services in Austria. An inventory of best practices of family policies has been initiated.

94. Supportive relationships with the non-governmental organizations committees on the Family at Vienna and in New York and Paris have been reinforced. Moreover, in 1996, the Division participated in various family-related meetings organized by concerned Governments and non-governmental organizations, including the Sixth International Seminar on Integrating Families in Social Progress and Development, held at Vienna in November 1996; the International Family Policy Forum, held at Kansas City in October 1996; and the International Seminar on Family Policy and Plans of Actions, held at Quebec City, Canada, in December 1996.

95. In the area of research, the Division initiated action-oriented research and case studies on the multiple roles of women; the impact of the technological revolution on the family; and reconciling family life with work.

Notes

[1] London, University College Press on behalf of the United Nations Development Programme, 1994.

E/CN.5/1997/5/Add.1

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UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.5/1997/5/Add.1
16 January 1997

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
Thirty-fifth session
25 February-6 March 1997
Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda*

FOLLOW-UP TO THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: REVIEW OF RELEVANT UNITED NATIONS PLANS AND PROGRAMMES OF ACTION PERTAINING TO THE SITUATION OF SOCIAL GROUPS

Emerging issues, trends and new approaches, and programme activities of the Secretariat and the regional commissions relating to social development, including the situation of specific groups

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

Social welfare and social development activities of the regional commissions for the biennium 1995-1996

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INTRODUCTION

1. During the period 1995-1996, the regional commissions have continued to undertake, within their respective regions, follow-up activities to international conferences and implementation of international programmes of action for social development. Particular impetus has been provided by the World Summit for Social Development, the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, and follow-up to the International Year of the Family. In response to General Assembly resolution 50/161 on implementation of the outcome of the Summit, the regional commissions will organize high-level meetings and/or expert group meetings, as well as other related events, to evaluate follow-up activities to the Summit. The promotion of policies and programmes for poverty alleviation and for managing the social consequences of structural adjustment, social integration and human resource development have received special attention. Activities targeting disabled persons, crime prevention, drug demand and human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) prevention have also been undertaken within the respective mandates of the commissions.

I. ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR EUROPE

A. Social development and welfare

2. The social problems facing the countries in transition to market economies are in many ways similar to the problems of the developed economies of western Europe, which are currently restructuring their economies, with profound implications for employment and the existing forms of social protection. Accordingly, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) and the Government of France, with the support of the European Community, organized a workshop on the theme "Managing the social consequences of structural change" in Paris on 28 and 29 November 1996.

3. The workshop sought to examine the impact of structural change on employment, workers' mobility and the functioning of labour markets, as well as the goals and forms of the social protection system, the way it operates and is financed; and to examine what forms of cooperation between the State, the social partners, local communities and the social welfare agencies might contribute more effectively to the management of the social consequences of structural change.

4. Other activities relevant to social development include the work of the ECE Statistical Division in the field of population and housing censuses. Currently, the ECE Statistical Division is preparing a set of ECE-Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) recommendations on populations and housing censuses in the region for the year 2000. Those recommendations will be ready for approval by the Conference of European Statisticians in 1997. With regard to social indicators and frameworks, the Conference of European Statisticians, through the ECE Statistical Division, participates in the work of the Siena Group, which deals with issues related to social monitoring and social

exclusion, intergovernmental relations, and social mobility and the integration of minority groups.

5. With regard to gender statistics, regular meetings are convened by the Conference to promote the collection of data disaggregated by sex and to assess and consider the gender dimension in a number of areas, such as unpaid work, health, employment, living conditions and ageing. For the 1995 World Conference on Women, the publication, Women and Men in Europe and North America was prepared. Regarding migration, ECE is participating in the preparation of a new set of draft international migration statistics together with the United Nations Statistical Division and Eurostat. The ECE secretariat is also producing the annual publication Housing and Building Statistics in Europe and North America, while its statistical yearbook, Trends in Europe and North America, contains social profiles of all 55 ECE member countries.

B. Youth

6. As part of the its population programme, ECE is conducting a survey involving men and women aged 20 years and over in 19 ECE member countries and New Zealand. Based on a common questionnaire containing various retrospective questions on vital issues, such as the choice of partners and marriage, decisions to have children and leaving the parental home, the survey will enhance the study of the effects of various social and economic conditions on the life experiences of individuals during youth and adolescence. Research themes to be studied, based on the data collected, include patterns of leaving the parental home, the impact of family dissolution on partnership behaviour of the next generation, sexual initiation and the contraceptive practices of adolescents.

C. Ageing

7. The four-year ECE project supported by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) "The dynamics of population ageing in ECE countries", was completed in 1996. The project will facilitate research on the social and economic conditions of the older population in Europe and North America. The project has assembled a set of cross-nationally comparable depersonalized microdata sets based on the 1990 round of national population and housing censuses, which will be used to study the social and economic conditions of older persons in a selected number of ECE member countries. Research themes to be studied will include labour force participation status; economic conditions and mobility patterns of older persons, as well as their living arrangements; and the social, economic and demographic characteristics of older persons living in institutions, in comparison with non-institutionalized older persons. The project is expected to increase the awareness of policy makers and non-governmental organizations in the field and to enhance national capacities for formulating and evaluating programmes and policies targeted towards older people. The following 14 countries have participated in the project: Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Russian Federation, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America.

8. Within the context of the above-mentioned project, a workshop on social protection, poverty, and older persons at risk was organized by the ECE secretariat and the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). The workshop was also part of the activities marking 1996 as the International Year for the Eradication of Poverty, and constituted a preparatory activity for the International Year for Older Persons (1999) and the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006). The aim was to define strategies for providing income security in old age, with an emphasis on the alleviation of poverty among older persons in high-risk groups. The programme of the workshop covered four main topics: conceptual issues of poverty in old age; women as one of the groups at risk, and the process known as the feminization of poverty; specific issues of poverty among other groups at risk; disabled and single persons; and ways to create an enabling environment for the improved well-being of older people.

9. Seventy-nine persons from 18 countries, representing Governments, intergovernmental organizations, research institutions and international and national non-governmental organizations, participated in the two-day meeting. The workshop was the second organized jointly by the ECE secretariat and AARP. The first workshop dealt with the preparatory activities of the World Summit for Social Development.

10. Taking into account the fact that countries in the ECE region are experiencing dramatic population changes that pose unprecedented public policy challenges, especially with regard to the need to protect the well-being and income security of various groups of older persons, people with disabilities and single old women, there is a growing need to monitor closely the status of older people at risk and to provide policy makers with accurate and up-to-date data and analysis.

11. In that connection, a general conceptual framework of action was discussed and adopted at the meeting, covering the areas of general policy instruments; the difficulty of poverty measurements among older women and older groups at risk; creating an enabling environment; and issues of social security and the role of the private sector, as well as of the non-profit sector and government. Priorities for immediate action were identified; they include the necessity to develop methodologies for measuring, monitoring and analysing poverty among older men and women and other groups using primary and secondary data; promoting the establishment of national and international networks of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, research institutions, scholars and policy makers interested in furthering joint data collection, research and policy analysis efforts; acknowledging the role of older persons in the family and the informal economy; promoting the sharing of family responsibilities, particularly caring for dependents, between men and women; and adopting programmes that will facilitate the reintegration of disabled persons into society.

12. Governments were urged to prepare for the coming of an ageing society by viewing older persons as a potential resource for their societies and to plan for their reintegration into the labour market or as volunteers in the social sector. They were also encouraged to review periodically public old age pension systems and ensure that eligibility and financing mechanisms are in line with

the demographic structure, labour market conditions and the changing social and economic conditions of a country.

D. Disabled persons

13. With regard to disabled persons, the ECE secretariat carried out an operational programme on rehabilitation engineering. A publication on that subject was issued and circulated during the World Summit for Social Development.

E. Families in development

14. Another ECE four-year project supported by UNFPA, "Fertility and family surveys in countries of the ECE region", ended in 1996. The surveys were conducted on the basis of a common questionnaire containing various retrospective questions on vital aspects of life, such as childhood, partners, education and work. The following 20 countries have completed their field work: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United States of America. Several other countries may conduct surveys during 1997-1998, possibly as part of a second round of fertility and family surveys.

15. Under a successor project, "Sexual behaviour and reproductive health and fertility regulation", the ECE secretariat is currently completing the archiving of the standardized Fertility and Family Survey data files along with the work of standard tabulations, which will ensure that the data are internationally comparable, of high quality and easily accessible to researchers. In addition country studies are now being prepared by experts. In the next few years, selected scholars are expected to produce comparative studies as part of a comparative research programme launched in late 1996. The project is expected to make a major contribution to knowledge, and to provide an important source of information for policy makers on issues related to ongoing changes in the family; the interplay of work, education and parenting; contraceptive knowledge and practices; and other issues.

II. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

A. The regional Agenda for Action on Social Development

16. The regional Agenda for Action on Social Development, adopted by the Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference in Preparation for the World Summit for Social Development (Manila, October 1994), reflects the regional consensus on social development priorities and policy and programme imperatives. Further support for the Agenda in the region has been extended by the Commission for Social Development in its resolution 51/4. The Agenda's primary focus is on the alleviation of poverty, which is recognized as the major scourge undermining the welfare and quality of life of large population groups within the region.

17. The secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has focused its activities in pursuance of resolution 51/4 of the Commission for Social Development by providing technical assistance to members and associate members in support of their efforts to attain the goals and targets of the regional Agenda. Activities are being implemented to support national initiatives through policy-oriented research and programme analysis based on country, subregional and regional studies and demonstration projects; exchange of experience and expertise through the organization of conferences, seminars and training workshops; advisory services in support of national social development initiatives; and exchange of personnel and the provision of training opportunities through technical cooperation among developing countries (TCDC). Those activities seek to identify and target the absolute poor, promote the social assessment of major development programmes, and improve national capacities and institutional frameworks for the effective implementation of the Agenda.

18. A regional workshop on the theme "Guidelines for the implementation of the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP region" was held at Bangkok in March 1996. As a follow-up, two publications are being prepared, one examining policy and programming issues and the other providing guidelines on the formulation of coherent national policies and programmes for the effective implementation of the Agenda.

19. Issues 34 and 35 of the Social Development Newsletter, focusing on social integration and poverty alleviation, respectively, have been prepared and disseminated. Issue 36 of the Newsletter, scheduled for distribution in April 1997, will focus on employment expansion. Thus, issues 34 to 36 of the Newsletter will review in the regional context the major themes developed at the World Summit for Social Development and elaborated in its Programme of Action.

20. The implementation of the regional Agenda and the promotion of policies and programmes for poverty alleviation through the enhancement of social security have received special attention. An expert group meeting, on the enhancement of social security for the poor was convened at Bangkok in November 1995. Subsequently, a document entitled "Towards social security for the poor in the Asia-Pacific region" (ST/ESCAP/1673), containing studies and recommendations on alternative policy programme options to enhance social security for the poor, was prepared and disseminated.

21. In compliance with resolution 51/4 of the Commission for Social Development, as well as with General Assembly resolution 50/161, entitled "Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development", ESCAP will convene the Fifth Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference on Social Development. The Philippines has offered to host the Conference at Manila in November 1997. A network of government-designated focal points has been established to assist in the national and regional preparations for the Conference.

22. The ESCAP secretariat plans to convene an expert group meeting in May 1997 and a regional senior officials consultation in June 1997. In addition, a series of advisory missions and national workshops on the implementation of the regional Agenda for Action on Social Development will assist various countries

in the region in their preparations for the Ministerial Conference. To facilitate the participation of non-governmental organizations and the private sector in their preparatory activities for the Ministerial Conference, a non-governmental organizations/private sector forum will be held at Bangkok in October 1997. The ESCAP secretariat has also issued a document entitled, "Enhancement of the role of non-governmental organizations in the implementation of the Agenda for Action on Social Development in the ESCAP Region" (ST/ESCAP/1625).

B. Youth

23. As a follow-up to the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, ESCAP convened the Asia-Pacific Meeting on Human Resources Development for Youth at Beijing in October 1996. The Meeting was organized with the cooperation of the All-China Youth Federation. It reviewed the regional youth situation and examined national policies and programmes concerning youth in the light of the Jakarta Plan of Action on Human Resources Development in the ESCAP Region and the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. A series of recommendations for regional cooperation in priority areas of human resources development (HRD) for youth were formulated. The report and recommendations of the meeting constitute an important regional input to the United Nations World Youth Forum, held at Vienna in November 1996.

24. In recognition of the tenth anniversary of the International Youth Year, the theme chosen for the 1995 ESCAP HRD Award was "HRD to promote productive employment for youth". The Social Work and Research Centre, better known as the Barefoot College, located at Tilonia, Rajasthan, India, was selected by a jury of international experts as the winner of the 1995 Award. The Award was presented at the fifty-second session of ESCAP. The ESCAP HRD Award is presented annually as a means of encouraging exemplary research and other innovative achievements in the field of HRD.

25. Training of trainers for youth participation in development continues to be a regular feature of ESCAP work. In 1996, a series of nine national workshops were held, involving key youth policy makers, youth leaders and trainers, to assist in building local capacity to promote constructive social participation of youth. On the basis of the experience gained during the national workshops, an HRD course for youth development will be offered on a regular basis, which could serve as a prototype for national training programmes for government and non-governmental organization personnel involved in the planning and delivery of skills development programmes for rural youth.

C. Ageing

26. The rapid ageing of societies in Asia and the Pacific, accompanied by the increasing proportion and absolute number of older persons in the population, has triggered concern for older persons in the region, while the economic and social impact of the ageing of populations poses a growing challenge to societies throughout the region.

27. In response to the need for a concerted effort to tackle the problem of ageing, the ESCAP secretariat has provided assistance to ESCAP member Governments in developing comprehensive national policies on ageing. Emphasis is placed on lifelong preparatory measures for old age. On the basis of a series of research studies on selected countries and a regional overview on lifelong preparation for old age in the region, a policy framework has been formulated to guide national policy and programme development for lifelong preparation for old age. This covers a spectrum of concerns ranging from income security and employment to health maintenance, education and housing. Following an expert consultation on the topic, the framework was adopted by a meeting of senior officials on a policy framework for lifelong preparation for old age, held at Bangkok in May 1996. A document reviewing the issues of old age, entitled "Lifelong preparation for old age in Asia and the Pacific" (ST/ESCAP/1684), was printed and distributed in November 1996.

28. To enhance public awareness of the major issues pertaining to ageing, the ESCAP secretariat updated and enlarged the "Annotated bibliography on policy and programme issues in the field of ageing" (ST/ESCAP/1471), which was first issued in 1994. Advisory service was provided by the ESCAP secretariat to a regional meeting of non-governmental organizations regarding issues pertaining to ageing and older persons, including lifelong preparation for old age.

29. Under the broad theme of cooperation between Governments and non-governmental organizations for poverty alleviation in the Asia and Pacific region, and in pursuance of General Assembly resolutions 47/5 and 50/141 on the proclamation and observance of 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons, as well as Economic and Social Council resolution 1993/22 on strengthening national mechanisms on ageing, the ESCAP secretariat has initiated a project on the development of policies and programmes on behalf of older persons. Project activities include a workshop on government-non-governmental organizations cooperation for older persons, held in January 1996. The meeting brought together non-governmental organizations in the region to exchange experiences in working for older persons and discuss ways and means to enhance cooperation between Governments and non-governmental organizations for older persons. The recommendations from this workshop will be further considered at a forum of government and non-governmental representatives, to be held in July 1997.

30. In its continuing effort to promote and develop policies and programmes for older persons, the ESCAP secretariat is preparing a directory of national focal points on ageing in Asia and the Pacific; a directory of non-governmental organizations active in dealing with older persons in the region; and a bibliography of international and regional mandates and relevant documents concerning ageing and older persons. It is envisaged that those documents will be issued as a sourcebook on ageing and older persons in Asia and the Pacific.

D. Disabled persons

31. At its fifty-second session, in April 1996, ESCAP endorsed the targets and recommendations for the implementation of the Agenda for Action for the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002, including the gender dimension. Thirty-one Governments of the region are signatories to the

Proclamation on the Full Participation and Equality of People with Disabilities in the Asian and Pacific Region. As a result of the ESCAP secretariat's efforts, several Governments are currently developing national disability legislation, while others are implementing such legislation. Similarly, increasing attention is being given to measures that improve disabled people's access to all services and infrastructure intended for the public, including public transportation, communications, education, skills development and employment. In support of the Asian and Pacific Decade, many ESCAP member Governments have committed themselves to regional cooperation activities, focusing on strengthening inter-sectoral coordination, inter-ministerial collaboration and monitoring of progress. There has been an increase in TCDC exchanges aimed at supporting the organizational development and participation of people with disabilities in the development process.

32. Through its technical cooperation trust fund for the activities of the Asian and Pacific Decade, ESCAP has supported the training and information activities of people with disabilities in the region's developing countries. A Pacific subregional workshop, held at Suva, Fiji, in February 1996, focused on developing linkages among, and strengthening the management of organizations of people with disabilities. ESCAP has also assisted in the development of the Cambodian Disabled People's Organization and in the convening of the first workshop of people with diverse disabilities in Viet Nam in October 1996.

33. A training workshop for women with disabilities, held at Bangkok in June 1995, generated documentation on the gender dimension of the Agenda for Action for the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons. As a follow-up, a publication on the problems faced by women with disabilities was issued and distributed at the Fourth World Conference on Women and at the accompanying Non-Governmental Organizations Forum, held at Beijing in September 1995. Follow-up activities by the trainees included the publication of a newsletter on the participation in the Beijing Forum and the convening of national workshops on gender issues in national disability movements.

34. ESCAP is providing technical assistance to three cities (Bangkok, Beijing and New Delhi) in the development of pilot projects to implement the ESCAP guidelines on the promotion of non-handicapping environments for disabled persons, which may be used as demonstration sites for TCDC activities. In addition, the city of Johor Bahru, Malaysia, has used the guidelines to incorporate barrier-free design in its urban renewal master plan. Through the intermediation of ESCAP, technical personnel from developing countries of the region participated in workshops on access promotion in Japan in 1995 and 1996.

35. With a view to improving the availability of assistive devices for poor persons with disabilities, ESCAP convened a regional workshop on the indigenous production and distribution of assistive devices in South India in September 1995. Preparation of a publication that will include a regional review and information on production methods for small workshops is under way.

36. Recent publications include: "Promotion of non-handicapping physical environments for disabled persons guidelines" (ST/ESCAP/1492); "Promotion of non-handicapping physical environments for disabled persons: case studies" (ST/ESCAP/1510); "Hidden sisters: women and girls with disabilities in the

Asian and Pacific region" (ST/ESCAP/1548); "Legislation on equal opportunities and full participation in development for disabled persons: a regional review" (ST/ESCAP/1622); and "Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons: action targets, gender dimensions" (ST/ESCAP/1669).

E. Human resources development

37. Some two thirds of the 900 million people the world over who lack access to basic reading and writing skills live in Asia, mostly in South Asia. Literacy levels are especially low among girls and women in South Asia, with serious implications for human resource development in the subregion. In collaboration with a number of non-governmental organizations, government agencies and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), ESCAP has undertaken a series of HRD activities to promote literacy for girls and women in South Asia.

38. Under a project on cooperation between Government and non-governmental organizations to promote HRD for women in South Asia through post-literacy programme development, a post-literacy programme for women is being formulated in five countries of South Asia. A manual for developing post-literacy programmes for women, with special emphasis on vocational and functional skills to improve women's quality of life, will also be developed. Post-literacy programmes at the local level will be implemented by the national non-governmental organizations in each country. Another project on the promotion of literacy for women through capacity-building of local organizations in South-East Asia and the Pacific has undertaken a needs assessment and adaptation of literacy programmes to local needs, followed by the implementation of functional literacy programmes for women at the local level.

39. While rapid economic growth based largely on investment in human resources has facilitated a reduction of the proportion of the poor in some parts of the ESCAP region, inadequate investment in human resources has sustained and in some cases actually increased the concentration of the poor in other parts of the region. Against this background, the ESCAP secretariat has prepared three studies on promoting HRD services for the poor, focusing on various issues related to HRD as a means of poverty alleviation. The publications are based on materials presented at a regional training seminar on promoting HRD services for the poor, held at Manila in September 1995.

40. Many developing countries in the region have embarked on comprehensive rural development programmes to alleviate poverty. An important factor in the success of many of those programmes has been their emphasis on participation of the rural poor, not only in the identification of specific means of rural uplift but also in their design, planning, implementation and evaluation. In recognition of that achievement, the topic of people's participation in community development was selected as the theme of the 1996 ESCAP HRD Award. The winner of the 1996 Award will be selected by an independent jury in February 1997.

III. ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

A. Social development and welfare

41. In response to the growing importance that Governments in the region attach to social issues, the Social Development Division and Statistics Division of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) jointly published, with the financial support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNFPA, the 1995 and 1996 editions of the Social Panorama of Latin America. Each edition provides a quantitative and qualitative analysis and information on various social issues, such as poverty, income distribution, employment, social spending, and equity. The 1995 edition was dedicated to issues related to family organization and poverty; child labour and its economic and social consequences; and the gender perspective, with special reference to women's access to paid employment and the importance of their contribution to household income. The edition also included a chapter on social policy issues in the sectors of health, education and social security, and an analysis of emerging themes, such as urban insecurity, violence and corruption. The 1996 edition includes a diagnosis and evaluation of programmes to alleviate poverty and an analysis of the main aspects of social integration programmes. Statistical data is based on household surveys.

42. Concerning social policy reform, several meetings were held and studies undertaken, leading to the publication of seven issues in the series Social Policies, dealing with topics such as educational systems, health policy reform and poverty programmes. Two regional expert meetings were held. The first meeting analysed the changes in the social structure of several countries in Latin America during the last decade, while the second meeting evaluated reforms in the areas of health, education, housing and social security. The meeting also identified policies to alleviate poverty, improve income distribution and increase employment and labour productivity.

43. With the financial support of the Government of the Netherlands, the ECLAC Statistics Division is currently working on a project concerning the diagnosis and evaluation of socio-economic progress in several Latin American countries and the impact of social policies. At the same time, with the support of the Organization of American States, the Division is implementing a joint programme on the social policies of Latin America. The aim of the project is to provide technical assistance and training in the formulation and evaluation of social programmes and projects. Regional courses, with a duration of four weeks, are held each year; the courses utilize a methodological cost-impact scheme appropriate for social projects.

44. In response to the World Summit for Social Development, which called on the regional commissions, in collaboration with intergovernmental organizations and other interested parties, to organize high-level meetings to evaluate follow-up to the Summit, ECLAC is exploring the possibility of holding a regional conference at Sao Paulo, Brazil, in April 1997, with the co-sponsorship of the Organization of American States, the United Nations Development Programme, the Inter-American Development Bank, UNICEF, the Pan American Health Organization/WHO, and the Latin American Economic System.

B. Youth

45. During 1995-1996, the ECLAC Social Development Division carried out a series of activities in support of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, in close collaboration with the Iberoamerican Youth Organization (OIJ). In particular, the Division participated in the design of a theoretical framework and discussion at a series of expert group meetings of the Regional Programme of Action for Youth Development in Latin America and its Operative Plan for 1996-1999. The Division also attended the Seventh Iberoamerican Conference of Youth Ministers (Buenos Aires, August 1996), at which the Plan was approved by member Governments.

46. The ECLAC Social Development Division held a seminar in April 1995 at ECLAC headquarters on youth opportunities for secondary education and employment in Chile. The research reports presented at that meeting were incorporated in the Social Policy series, numbers 8, 9, 10 and 11. The meeting assigned top priority to rural youth as one of the most disadvantaged youth sections in the region. In 1996, with the support of OIJ and UNICEF, the Division published a book in Spanish entitled Rural youth, modernity and democracy in Latin America. The Division also provided input to the Interregional Consultation on Rural Youth, held at the headquarters of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in Rome in 1995, and provided training for rural youth workers in a seminar organized by the Rural Youth Network of the Southern Cone of South America (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay); for the regional offices of FAO and UNFPA with rural youth reproductive health educators (Bolivia, Chile, Colombia and Paraguay); and for youth researchers in Mexico.

C. Families in development

47. As a follow-up to the activities of the International Year of the Family, the ECLAC secretariat has formulated a set of indicators on the situation of families as a way to promote the development of sound policies aimed at strengthening the family. The 1995 and 1996 Social Panorama of Latin America, provide updated social indicators on families and households. The ECLAC secretariat also published a study entitled "Sobre revoluciones ocultas: la familia en Uruguay", as part of the project on human development, with the financial support of UNDP. And in 1995, the ECLAC Social Development Division distributed in both Spanish and English the publication Family and Future: A Regional Programme for Latin America and the Caribbean, and kept close contacts with relevant organizations of the region.

48. Finally, ECLAC participated in meetings organized by the academic community, such as the Third Iberoamerican Conference on the Family, organized by the University of Vale do Rios Sinos in Brazil in 1995; the seminar on the family held by the Universidad de Concepción in Chile in May 1996; and an international seminar on the Latin American realities of families, organized by the Universidad de Concepción in October 1996.

IV. ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

A. Social development and welfare

49. In view of the growing need to exchange information and ideas on how best to promote human or socially centred development policies and strategies in the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) region, the ECA secretariat has continued to collaborate closely with intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, United Nations agencies and other international institutions, by hosting and conducting a number of meetings, conferences, seminars and workshops dealing with a range of issues related to social development in the region. In addition, the ECA secretariat has undertaken studies and produced a number of technical publications on social issues.

50. Great emphasis has been placed by the ECA secretariat on the central role of people's participation in the development of human resources and social transformation. Accordingly, the ECA secretariat has supported various activities of non-governmental organizations and has assisted community-based people's organizations to develop and implement participatory projects and programmes in various African countries. One such initiative was the launching of the report Human Development in Africa, which is the main vehicle for reporting on the trends and developments relating to social and human development in Africa. The report highlights significant human development issues and reviews progress achieved and setbacks encountered in the implementation of commitments made to improve human endeavour in Africa. The themes explored in the report include goals for the child, health for all and basic education for all.

51. The Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Human Development, in conjunction with the follow-up Ministerial Committee of Fifteen, is playing a catalytic role in the implementation of the various recommendations of the World Summit for Social Development. Following extensive discussions on the 1995 issue of Human Development in Africa, the follow-up Committee of Fifteen agreed that its next issue should include measurable indicators to assess the progress made in advancing social development at the country level. The report also serves as a tool for inter-agency monitoring at the regional level.

52. As part of its overall efforts, the ECA secretariat continues to promote socio-economic development in the region. In that connection, two publications, Report on the Economic and Social Situation in Africa 1995, and Economic and Social Survey of Africa, 1994/1995, analysing the social conditions in the region, have been prepared by the ECA secretariat. In addition, seminars on the social impact of structural adjustment programmes have been held in cooperation with the Arab Research Centre at Cairo and the National School of Administration and Magistracy at Yaoundé, Cameroon, in 1995. Particular emphasis was placed on providing assistance to ECA member States in the planning, development and utilization of human resources through workshops, seminars and training. In cooperation with the African Women in Crisis Umbrella Programme of the United Nations Development Fund for Women, the ECA secretariat organized a conference on the theme "Legal status of refugee and internally displaced women in Africa".

53. A joint project with UNICEF led to the publication of the Atlas of the African Child in 1995, as a follow-up to the consensus of Dakar, the World Summit for Children and the African Common Position on Human and Social Development in Africa. The Atlas graphically focuses attention on the myriad problems facing African children; its main message is that developing human capabilities and meeting the basic needs of the child are the prerequisites and cornerstones to sustainable human development in Africa.

54. With regard to health problems, a senior policy seminar on the social impact of HIV/AIDS in households and families in Africa provided an important forum for experts, policy makers and practitioners to examine the socio-economic and cultural impact of HIV/AIDS on household families, the individual and society at large. In addition, the experts assessed the impact of known HIV/AIDS preventive strategies, such as condom promotion, sensitization campaigns and the control of sexually transmitted diseases, and suggested other practical strategies that could be used to halt the rapid spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Africa.

B. Youth

55. Youth represent approximately 19 per cent of the African population, a figure that is expected to increase given the present rate of population growth. It is clear, therefore, that youth represent a vast potential for human resource development in Africa, particularly when viewed in the light of the adverse socio-economic circumstances prevailing in the region. Accordingly, the ECA secretariat organized jointly with the Commonwealth Youth Programme Africa Centre a regional expert group meeting on youth, drugs and health. The findings of the meeting indicate that the scope of the drug problem and consequent health hazards have not spared the African region. The scourge of drug addiction has spread progressively throughout the continent, threatening all segments of society, especially young people. Illegal drug production and trafficking is expanding as an increasing number of African countries serve as production and transit points. Moreover, available data demonstrate that while sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) occur among the sexually active population as a whole between 15 and 49 years of age, the incidence of STDs among youth (15-25) is particularly high and is increasing rapidly.

C. Families in development

56. The ECA secretariat has prepared a paper entitled, "The impact of political conflicts and instability on social progress and cohesion in Africa with emphasis on the family". The paper points out that although there are many factors that give rise to conflicts in Africa, the most important are unequal development and gross disparities among different communities within the same country; absence of democratic process; the inability of States to guarantee the security of persons; and various exogenous factors. The paper maintains that the roots of violence in Africa are to be found in power politics, traditional tribal rivalries and personal vendettas. Since the family is the basic social unit for nurturing and educating children, and is very often the victim of

violence, the paper stressed the need to do everything possible to protect families both during and after periods of conflict, such as civil wars.

57. Assistance in the form of substantive inputs was also provided by the ECA secretariat to the African Centre for Applied Research and Training in Social Development, and the United Nations African Institute for the Prevention of Crime and Treatment of Offenders. ECA also participated in the Ninth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, held at Cairo from 28 April to 8 May 1995.

V. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA

A. Social development and welfare

58. As a result of investment in building the infrastructure for social services in the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) region over the past two decades, social development indicators have shown a steady growth in terms of improved health services and a quantitative increase of educational output and nutrition. Nevertheless, the region has registered a decline in the overall social situation. Apart from political factors, the situation has been exacerbated by a combination of relatively high fertility rates, high rates of unplanned urbanization (rural/urban migration), and poor educational systems that do not properly equip graduates to obtain productive employment. Those developments have led to a worsening of the problems of unemployment and poverty in the region.

59. The past decade has brought a shift in approach to public service delivery. Services are increasingly provided in a piecemeal fashion in an attempt to contain a growing urban crisis. Provisions are motivated by pressure to meet the needs of an increasing population while adhering to cost constraints. The predominant feature of the past decade has been an attempt for the public sector to withdraw from the provision of housing and services, resulting in a marked drop in the standard, quality and frequency of the distribution of services. Since the late 1980s, the structural adjustment policies adopted under stringent macroeconomic conditions in such countries as Egypt and Jordan have been paving the way for privatizing public services. It is not yet clear how those measures are affecting the cost, quality and standards of the services delivered and what their ultimate impact will be on people's living standards and quality of life. Nonetheless, a rise in the level of urban poverty has already been noted in such countries that seems to coincide with the downward trend in the provision of basic amenities to the public.

60. With regard to unemployment, the present trend to privatize the public sector in an effort to reduce dependence on the welfare state has further exacerbated the unemployment situation, especially given the high growth rate of the youth population. More people will be released from long-standing government employment, with low levels of skills that do not allow them to find jobs in the private sector. Privatization in particular and structural adjustment policies in general may be economically feasible, but their negative social consequences are enormous. At the same time, globalization of the world economy contributes to the vulnerability of uncompetitive enterprises and can

lead to additional unemployment. Those developments have given rise to double-digit unemployment rates for the region as a whole during the 1990s. Unemployment rates in non-oil producing countries are among the highest in the world, with real wages falling more rapidly than in any other region and the average worker earning no more in real terms than he did in the early 1970s. The deterioration in wages occurred even though massive investment in human capital outpaced that of any other region. With unemployment persisting in most countries of the region in the past decade and with no solution in sight, the situation will eventually result in long-term unemployment.

61. To summarize, ESCWA countries are facing a vast number of emerging challenges involving labour market problems related to labour absorption; the restructuring of education; the creation of productive employment opportunities; structural imbalances in the labour market of each country; underemployment in the public sector; rehabilitation of the unemployed, especially those who suffered from long-term unemployment; integration of new entrants to the labour markets, especially youth; restructuring and downsizing of the public sector; and increasing pressures to pursue market-based growth paths and to open to the global economy. Solving those problems will require adopting a new approach to human capital that differs vastly from the past, and such solutions are unlikely to be found at the country level. The trend to globalize the international economy implies open access to large markets but at the same time increases global competition.

62. On the question of poverty, it should be noted that, apart from political factors such as wars and internal conflicts and the poor management of the financial and human resources, which play a major role in increasing poverty, the spread of poverty in the region has also been the result of several socio-economic factors that have developed over time, including high rates of population growth that have not been matched by adequate economic growth; chaotic rural migration to urban centres, coupled with the development of urban slum areas; and lack of employment opportunities for new entrants to the labour market. Moreover, a combination of poor income distribution and ineffective safety nets has led to the further spread of poverty.

63. The current situation in many countries is one of increased economic difficulties, deteriorating social sectors and soaring unemployment. Those developments have led to the impoverishment of the middle class and the creation of a new group of poor, adding to the complexity of defining the poor and poverty of the region. The problems generated by the new category of poor will require specific policies and measures. In certain respects, they are very different from the traditional poor in that they tend to be better educated, generally healthy, have smaller families, and are possibly more employable with properly guided retraining programmes.

64. Other social ills currently confronting the region are related to crime, family disintegration, drug abuse, and the marginalization and alienation of certain social groups. Although the magnitude of such problems is still small compared with the situation in other regions, the fact it has grown at a rapid rate during the past decade warrants special attention. The spread and growth of such social problems is directly linked to the rise in poverty and lack of job opportunities. Poverty, coupled with the inability to find a proper job,

can result in frustrations that lead to extremism and violence, hence social instability. As such, a new social contract that conforms to the new global realities is needed to alleviate poverty and unemployment.

65. In order to address those complex social problems, ESCWA has increasingly given top priority to social issues, just as it does to economic matters. In the area of poverty alleviation, the ESCWA secretariat has undertaken a number of technical studies on the concept, measurement and determinants of poverty in Western Asia. In a study on poverty measurement, ESCWA is developing a poverty estimation model based on private consumption, nutritional intake, enrolment in primary education, and the infant mortality rate in the countries of the region. Based on that model, the percentage of the population in various countries has been estimated for 1992. A second regional study, entitled "Poverty in Western Asia: a social perspective", provides a poverty profile for the region, with analysis on the extent, nature and causes of poverty. The study singles out four issues to assess their correlation to poverty: population dynamics, employment, health and education. It also identified groups of people most affected by poverty.

66. The ESCWA secretariat has undertaken several poverty profiles for countries or areas in the region, including for Iraq, Lebanon, and the West Bank and Gaza. Once the country profiles and sectoral studies are completed, emphasis will shift to the evaluation of policy measures adopted by ESCWA member States to combat poverty. The final stage (1998-1999 biennium) will be devoted to proposing operational policies aimed at eradicating poverty in the region.

67. Regarding issues related to social integration, ESCWA has concentrated its efforts on enhancing local community development in selected rural areas of Syria and Egypt through the mobilization of local capabilities and the participation of available human resources. The project is supported by the United Nations Volunteers and the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND). A final evaluation was made in November 1996, with prospects for expansion to include other countries in the region, such as Lebanon. Several studies and lessons learned from the implementation of the project will be issued in due course.

68. The ESCWA secretariat provides technical assistance and support to Governments in establishing sustainable human development networks. In addition, it provides backstopping to Governments to prepare national human development reports. The ESCWA Human Development Section is implementing with the United Nations Development Programme a project entitled "Preparatory assistance for regional support of national efforts in pursuit of sustainable human resources". The project aims to implement the concept of sustainable human development through supporting national efforts to adopt and implement the concepts and methodologies of SHD. The main goals of the project are to support national efforts in pursuit of sustainable human development and to establish a mechanism for the exchange of information and experiences in that field at the national and regional levels; to participate in the dissemination of information on successful experiences in sustainable human development and the theoretical evolution of the concept and methodology of SHD; and to establish an Arab strategy for sustainable human development and formulate a programme for the implementation of that strategy.

69. To achieve those goals, the following activities have been planned: creating national networks on sustainable human development in at least four countries; engaging concerned governmental institutions and scientific research centres, and establishing a regional sustainable human development network; holding two workshops on successful practical experiences in SHD, the first at Cairo on the report of the Egyptian human development experience held in May 1995, the second at Khartoum on community development; and publishing six specialized studies on sustainable human development in the Arab world.

B. Disabled persons

70. In the area of social integration and as a follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development, ESCWA has promoted the study of disability-related activities towards disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons. A study entitled "The situation of disabled women: their marginalization and measures for social integration in the ESCWA region" was issued to that end.

71. ESCWA has opened the Arab Regional Computer Training Centre for Blind Women at Amman. The ongoing project is organized in collaboration with the Regional Centre for Rehabilitation and Training for Blind Girls at Amman, with funding provided by AGFUND and the United Nations Voluntary Fund on Disability, and with support from the Japan International Cooperation Agency. The project aims to upgrade the literacy levels of blind women and train them in basic computer skills in order to enhance their employment opportunities.

72. Another disability-related programme activity is the updating of the bibliography on disability issues in the Arab region, which was published in 1989. The bibliography is being processed on the Integrated Scientific Information System programme, and will be published in 1997.

C. Families in development

73. The structure of the Arab family has been undergoing radical transformation. Armed conflicts and political disturbances, rapid urbanization, industrialization, migration, new technologies and access to information have led to a gradual erosion of traditional social values and norms. Socio-economic factors, including the growing participation of women in the labour force, have had their impact on the fabric of the family in the region, contributing to the rise of the nuclear family and changing attitudes and values that affect relations among family members. The extended family is giving way to the nuclear family, in both urban and in rural areas due to internal and external migration. Despite that change, an alternative to the traditional family as a social institution and as a source of cohesion and support within the society has not emerged, although some of its functions are being assumed by other entities.

74. While traditional family forms remain the norm in much of the region, changing social and economic realities have imposed increasing pressure among family members in recent decades. Those changes are posing difficult challenges for the Arab family and for policy makers concerned with maintaining social

stability and cohesion. Such challenges include the weakening of family ties due partially to spatial mobility; gradual shifting away from extended to nuclear and more flexible family forms; an increasing emphasis on individual rather than communitarian social values; and a redefining of the traditional roles and expectations of individual family members, particularly those of women as caregivers, towards more egalitarian and task-sharing partnerships within the family.

75. During the current biennium, family issues are being addressed separately and within the framework of other activities: a database is to be built on policies and measures to address the impact of current social changes on women and the family in the region, and a publication entitled Annotated Bibliography on Arab Women and the Family: A Critical Assessment is to be issued.

76. As a follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and the International Year of the Family, an operational regional programme for action was formulated to further the advancement of Arab women and cement ties within the Arab family. Towards that end, an Arab conference on formulating a regional programme for action and follow-up mechanism was convened one year after the Fourth World Conference on Women at Amman from 25 to 29 September 1996. The Arab conference adopted a programme of action identifying concrete projets in three areas of critical concern to Arab women and the family: poverty, decision-making and family issues. Activities under the family theme fall under the umbrella of alleviating women's poverty through their empowerment, and include a survey of female-headed households on the feasibility of setting up micro-credit lending facilities for poor women in rural and urban areas and for female single-headed households; and studying the changing values of youth in families, with a focus on identity crisis in conflict-stricken areas in the region.